



Cammeray Croquet Club

<http://www.cammeray-croquet.org.au>

May Newsletter

Club News

Do not forget to come to the Cammeray Social Day on 31st May. It is a chance for old and new members to get to know each other. It will consist of a morning tea followed by GC or Pirates games and go from 10 am to noon.

Sadly the Cammeray Birthday Tournament was cancelled as it only received 13 entries. It will be re-scheduled later in the year.

Our member Rob Barrie has been appointed deputy chair of CNSW. Congratulations, Rob!

Tournaments and upcoming tournaments

After all the tournaments last month, this month has seen nothing so far involving Cammeray Members. However, there are some exciting tournaments coming up soon.

CNSW Men's singles 29-31 – James Carlisle, Rob Elliott, Peter Landrebe

MacRobertson Shield. The 2026 Association Croquet World Team Championships - Tier 1, competing for the MacRobertson Shield - will be held in England between 24th July and 9th August 2026. The participants will be Australia, England, New Zealand and USA. The Australian team will be: Stephen Forster (vice-captain), Edward Wilson, Greg Hill, Stephen Pearce, Trevor Bassett, Dwayne McCormick.

Peter Landrebe will be the non-playing captain and manager.

Pennants: Likely captains of the two Open teams are Rosie and Peter Landrebe. There is likely to be a Premier team consisting of James Carlisle and Alison Sharpe and possibly another consisting of Rosie and Peter Landrebe. The Silver team has been withdrawn. There will be a Bronze team captained by Warren Yates.

I came across this interview with Robert Fulford recently – he has been acclaimed as the finest croquet player of all time. In August 2009 he became the only person to complete a nontuple peel. For the unfamiliar with the term, this consists of running three hoops in your first turn, then in your second running your partner ball through 12 hoops while peeling the other ball through its remaining nine hoops (and then pegging out).

Interview with Robert Fulford *by Dylan Goodwin* **from The Croquet Network: September 28, 2023**



Robert Fulford in play during the 2023 AC World Championship semifinals at Hurlingham. Photo by Andrew Moss.

In July, croquet players and fans across the world were treated to a captivating WCF Association Croquet World Championship held at Hurlingham and nearby clubs in England. Thanks to daily live streaming, fans were able to watch as England's Robert Fulford won an unprecedented sixth WCF AC World title in a dramatic final against American Matthew Essick that went to a fifth game. Recently, we caught up with Robert and he was willing to participate in a question and answer through email. Here is how our discussion played out.

Congratulations on your sixth WCF AC World Title! That is quite a gap back to that last title in 2002. What are your thoughts on once again being world champion?

It's a great feeling being world champion again. I love having sneaked ahead in my friendly rivalry with Reg Bamford with six championships to his five.

Can you give us some perspective on the level of play in this decade compared to the first decade of World Championships in the 1990s?

Going right back to 1990 the standard of play was lower in general. As outplayer, you would feel hopeful of an error if your opponent was faced with a three-yarder. Longer-headed mallets and casting were beginning to catch on. These would radically improve shooting and player reliability at mid-turn roquets. No one was consistently completing most of their delayed TPs, even in the easiest conditions. Irish peeling rover was really rare, because the Jaques balls were harder and less consistent than later balls. Supershot openings were an obscurity.

The late eighties and early nineties were a hotbed of talent in the U.K. By the mid-nineties we were much closer to modern standards. Reg Bamford and Chris Clarke were fabulous touch croquet stroke players, very unlikely to fail a delayed TP. Dave Maugham was often going around third turn. Jerry Stark in the States was pretty good at going around third turn too. I was starting to put strings of fifth and sixth-turn wins together.

Since then, play has improved again with better mallets, modern Dawson balls and swing trainers and another 30 years of tactical understanding, but those mid-nineties players as they were would be competitive now.

The WCF Hall of Fame page indicates you were born in 1969, which means you won that first title when you were 21. So you have the experience of being a world champion at an early age. Can you offer perspective on what the differences are between competing at the top level as a younger player and now as a plus 50 player?

The main differences for me are available time and having to live with a dodgy wrist. In my 20s croquet was my priority. I took every opportunity to travel and play. I practiced about two to three hours a day leading into major tournaments. My matches tended to be quick and I'd regularly practice later in the day at tournaments too.

These days family comes first and I haven't played outside southern England since 2014. Before this year's world championship, I'd never played a game against anyone I played in knockout which seems incredible.

My greatest strength at 20 was power cut rushing. I cast over the ball. On my final backswing, I used to cock the wrists back and then be able to generate a lot of acceleration. Hoop running with power was really useful too. I spent 25 years smashing the ball around, but by 2010 my left wrist had become prone to being easily inflamed and painful.

During the mid-nineties, I worked with Kevin Brereton in Australia, spending six months playing with a more from-the-shoulders technique with the aim of reducing wrist strain. At the time I couldn't get up to the same standard as using the wristy swing, but it did mean I had a good starting point when I was forced to change.

Without cocking the wrist, I didn't have much backswing. I heard Ian Burrige describing my "funny little swing," which got me thinking about a bent-handled mallet. I started using one about five years ago and I can highly recommend one to any Irish grip players who feel wrist strain.

I need to monitor how my wrists are and it is limiting on how much hitting I do. A big chunk of my practice now is casting without hitting balls in a swing trainer, just training my larger muscles to do the right thing. It is relatively easy to fit in an hour at home and

light on the wrists when they aren't in perfect shape, but certainly not as much fun as hitting balls.

I have more experience now, better croquet strokes, better understanding of how to play certain turns, but my power single-ball strokes have gone.

Is there a tournament win or croquet highlight overall that stands out to you as your favourite over your full career?

My best performance was in the 2003 British Open final against Reg Bamford. I'd been recognized as the best player for most of the 90's, but Reg really took things to a new level in 2001. At one point during 2002, I overheard a spectator saying about me, "he is absolutely the second-best player in the world!" I won the world championship in 2002 but I hadn't had to play Reg.

The match was played in some of the most difficult conditions I've ever played in. It was a hot, dry summer. The lawns at Cheltenham probably averaged about 13 seconds without being that flat. The hoops were firm and you would be in big trouble if your approach shot started drifting downhill.

I managed to win the best of five match 3-0 without making any errors and I still easily rate that as my best performance.

My favorite shot was in a turn choosing to take my forward ball from 4-back to the peg with partner still on 1. I needed to obtain a rush on a ball near hoop 4 to penult but got a rush pointing closer to rover. In normal conditions I could take it to the near the peg and take off for position, but the odds of approaching from there were small. I managed a super thin cut rush to within a yard of penult, which needed the combination of power, touch and direction all to come together.

You mentioned the wrist issues. I heard during the commentary that you would not be playing GC events going forward due to the stress on your wrists. Is that accurate and overall what are your plans for competing going forward? Will you defend your AC World title in the U.S. in 2025?

GC is harder on my wrists. I was lucky the last GC championships were played with hard balls on fast lawns. On something slower with the latest batch of Dawsons, I just wouldn't be able to clear hard enough to compete without ending up with my wrist inflamed on day one. I might play in the odd local GC event where I know the lawns are likely to be fast, but I'm not expecting to play more GC than that in the next few years.

I've seen the date for 2025 described as late October. If the organizers are reading, October 25-November 2 works best for me!

You are generally considered the best tactical player in the sport. Is there anything specific that you did to develop that strength or is it just a natural gift?

Before I ever played croquet, I played a great deal of competitive chess which certainly helps develop thinking skills applicable to croquet.

There are lots of good tacticians around and when I started playing there was plenty of lively tactical debate to be had. I spent a huge amount of time hanging out at tournaments with Chris Clarke discussing the wrongs and rights of our own and other player's turns.

I've been responsible for a few tactical innovations. It does need some imagination. I do sometimes draw a sketch of the lawn and look at different possible positionings of balls on paper to help with the thinking process.

Innovation in some ways is a natural consequence of being one of the first to be a stronger player than the generation before. Bad risks for the old generation become acceptable risks for the new when they are better at the shots. For example, the leave at the end of a third turn break Jerry Stark christened '3 ducks' where you place all 3 balls near the maximum distance from the baulk area on the west boundary was one of my ideas. In the eighties, no one played supershot openings and third turn breaks were rare, so no one had put much thought into third turn leaves before.

Since 2016, I believe each AC World Final has had some sort of live stream. And I've felt each one has been quite entertaining with varying degrees of interactivity. Do you think the recent WCF Worlds have offered a case that advanced rules with challenging hoops can offer enough interactivity? Or do you think a move to super-advanced rules or some other next-level rule set is inevitable?

Fast lawns and tough hoops are the ideal for a world championship. As long as the hosts can keep providing this there isn't a pressing need to change. In easy conditions, I do prefer super-advanced, but it is rarely being played outside the U.K.

What do you see for the future of the sport?

It seems like GC is waxing and AC is waning a little at the minute. I love AC so I'm certainly hoping we can keep going. There is a tremendous amount of effort that goes in and I appreciate all the people who put the work in to keep their clubs running.

—Interview by Dylan Goodwin. Lightly edited for clarity, grammar and style.

Further edited for this newsletter